

NAXOS

ROSSINI

Complete Overtures • 4

Il barbiere di Siviglia

Il Turco in Italia • Armida



Prague Sinfonia Orchestra • Christian Benda

Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868): Complete Overtures • 4

Gioachino Antonio Rossini, one of the most successful and popular operatic composers of his time, was born in Pesaro in 1792. His father, a brass-player, had a modest career, disturbed by the political changes of the period as the French replaced the Austrians in Northern Italy. Rossini's mother was a singer and as a boy Rossini appeared with his father in the pit orchestra and from time to time as a singer with his mother on stage, going on to work as a keyboard-player in the opera orchestra. Rossini's early studies in music were with his father and mother, and with other teachers through the generosity of rich patrons. In childhood he had already started to show ability as a composer and his experience in the opera-house bore natural fruit in a remarkable and meteoric career that began in 1810 with the production of *La cambiale di matrimonio* in Venice.

There followed a series of operas, comic and tragic, ending with *Semiramide* in Venice in 1823, the last of Rossini's operas for Italy. There had been attractive offers from abroad, and successful visits to Vienna and to London, but he now turned his attention to Paris. Under the Bourbon King Charles X Rossini staged French versions of earlier works and in 1829 *Guillaume Tell*. A contract for further operas came to nothing when the King was replaced in the revolution of 1830 by Louis-Philippe, although eventually, after some six years, Rossini was able to have his agreed annuity restored. With matters settled in France, in 1836 he returned to Italy and in spite of ill health concerned himself with the affairs of the Liceo Musicale in Bologna. The revolutionary disturbances there in 1848, activities with which he had little sympathy, seemed to threaten him and his second wife, Olympe Pélissier, whom he had married in 1846, after the death of his first wife, the singer Isabella Colbran, from whom he had been legally separated since 1837. For his own safety he moved first to Florence, but in 1855, partly in a search for better health, returned to Paris. In that city and a few years later at his new villa at Passy he passed the rest of his life.

Il barbiere di Siviglia remains the most popular of Rossini's comic operas, providing a witty and lively score to accompany a series of incidents worthy of any farce. The first performance in Rome in February 1816 was unsuccessful as a result of objections made by supporters of Paisiello's opera of 1782, also based on the first play of the trilogy by Beaumarchais. Originally with the title *Almaviva, ossia L'inutile precauzione* (Almaviva, or The

Useless Precaution), to avoid confusion with Paisiello's work, Rossini's opera deals with the plan by Count Almaviva to woo Rosina and win her hand in marriage. With the help of the barber and general factotum Figaro, he carries out his plan to outwit her guardian, Dr Bartolo, who has his eye on his ward's fortune. The overture was that originally written for the opera *Aureliano in Palmira*, later modified by Rossini to serve the same purpose for the opera *Elisabetta, regina d'Inghilterra*. The E major *Andante maestoso* introduction to the overture leads to an E minor *Allegro con brio*, its first theme entrusted to the strings and the second, in G major, to the oboe, then flute and horn. An impressive *crescendo* is succeeded by a recapitulation and an emphatic coda.

Il Turco in Italia (The Turk in Italy) was first given at La Scala in Milan in August 1814, its humour lying largely in its contrast of manners. The poet Prosdócimo finds the subject for a new comedy in the ill-matched Geronio and his flirtatious wife Fiorilla, prepared, already, to throw her cap at Selim, the Turkish Pasha, once loved by Zaida, a girl who has taken refuge in a gypsy encampment near Naples. Fiorilla entertains Selim, newly arrived in Naples, to coffee, and deals with both Geronio and Narciso. Prosdócimo advises Geronio to manage his wife with firmness, but his attempts at this prove unsuccessful. The principal characters gather at the gypsy camp, seeking their fortunes in one way or another. Selim meets Zaida again and Zaida and Fiorilla confront each other. Selim now suggests that he should buy Fiorilla from Geronio, a proposal the latter rejects. Prosdócimo, eager for a comic outcome, offers a further plan. At a masked ball Geronio should masquerade as Selim, to forestall the real Selim's planned abduction of Fiorilla. Narciso overhears the plan, and assumes the same disguise, so that there are three Selims at the ball. Matters are finally resolved when the real Selim decides to return home with Zaida, and Fiorilla is left to make the best of the revelation of her fickle behaviour. The overture to the opera, with its effective horn solo in the opening *Adagio*, has a lively *Allegro* theme for the strings and, after a tempestuous transition, a second theme introduced by clarinet and bassoon, followed by the trumpet, both making their due return in recapitulation.

The *Sinfonia in E flat* dates from Rossini's student days between 1806 and 1809 in Bologna. It is more familiar as the source of the overture to *La cambiale di*

matrimonio, for which it was adapted, to be used again, after further revision, as an overture for *Adelaide di Borgogna* in 1817.

Ricciardo e Zoraide was first staged at the Teatro San Carlo in Naples in 1818. Agorante, angry at the refusal of Ircano to give him his daughter Zoraide in marriage, ousts Ircano from his kingdom of Nubia and later takes prisoner Zoraide, who has meanwhile fallen in love with the knight Ricciardo. Ricciardo, in disguise, tricks Agorante into allowing a combat between himself and Ircano in which he is victorious, but when Ircano, Zoraide and Ricciardo find themselves prisoners of Agorante, they are saved by the intervention of the Christian knights of Ricciardo's company, led by Ernesto. Agorante is pardoned and Ricciardo duly united in marriage with Zoraide. Rossini's opera starts with an overture that suggests later styles of composition in its latent romanticism. In the score it is coupled with the first scene of the opera as *Sinfonia e Introduzione*. A C minor *Largo* leads to a *Marziale* section, followed by an F major *Andante*. In the opera the *Marziale* is to return in the *Introduzione* with the chorus.

Torvaldo e Doriška, a rescue opera, had its first staging in Rome in 1815. The Duke of Ordow is in love with Torvaldo's wife Doriška, who escapes a trap set for her and her beloved Torvaldo in the forest. Doriška makes the mistake of seeking refuge in the Duke's castle, where she is welcomed by the comic servants Carlotta and Giorgio, and meets Torvaldo, who has entered the castle disguised as a woodsman. They are both eventually rescued, with the help of the servants and a renegade follower of the Duke, who is overthrown by the rebellious villagers. Rossini's opera has a lively enough overture, its slower introduction leading to an *Allegro vivace* in which the second theme is to be used again a year or so later in *La Cenerentola*.

Rossini's *Armida*, with its difficult casting that calls for six tenors, was first mounted in Naples in 1817. Its plot, variously employed by earlier composers, is based on Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*. Armida, in an attempt to deceive the crusaders, seeks help against Idrante, the supposed usurper of the throne of Damascus. Rinaldo, elected leader of the crusaders, kills his rival Germando in single combat and takes refuge with Armida in her enchanted palace, bewitched. Two of Rinaldo's comrades arrive and show him his reflection in the polished surface of a shield, an event related in Tasso's

poem. Coming to his senses, he leaves Armida, who is now torn between love and desire for revenge. The opening *Sinfonia* contrasts two elements, the steady march of the crusaders and a rapid *Vivace*, the march unexpectedly returning to interrupt the livelier section.

Le Comte Ory, Rossini's fourth opera for Paris, was first staged at the Paris Opéra in August 1828. Set in thirteenth-century France, the opera deals with the attempts of Count Ory to woo the Countess Adèle, whose brother is away on a crusade. She and her ladies have abjured love in his absence. Ory disguises himself as a hermit, deceiving even his tutor and his page, Isolier. The latter is also in love with the Countess and gains admission to the castle, with Ory, who warns the Countess against him, while absolving her from her vow, only to have his identity revealed by his tutor. In the second act Ory and his men, disguised as nuns, seek shelter from a storm in the castle, where they alternate their behaviour between emptying the wine-cellar and an appearance of prayer. Isolier tricks Ory into an assignment that he supposes is with the Countess, but is in fact also with his page, and he and his men make their escape as the husband of the Countess is heard returning. The *Introduction* is well matched to the plot, its outer sections suggesting the Count's cunning exploits, with a martial passage at its heart, the returning opening section ending in the plucked notes of the strings.

Bianca e Falliero, a work no longer in general current repertoire, was first performed at La Scala, Milan, in December 1819. Bianca loves the young Venetian general, Falliero, but her father has promised her in marriage to Capellio. She refuses to sign the wedding contract, but Falliero, who has supported her, takes refuge in the Spanish Embassy, thus breaking the law of Venice. He is to be judged by the Council of Three, suggested in the full alternative title of the opera, *Il consiglio di tre*, Capellio, her father and another official. It is Capellio's perception of Bianca's sincerity that leads, in the opera at least, to Falliero's release and a happy ending. The opening *Allegro vivace* of the overture uses echo effects, before a solemn minor-key *Andante* intervenes. There is rapid figuration followed by a return of the original *Allegro*, with its echo effects and a characteristic melody and *crescendo*, leading to a triumphant conclusion.

Keith Anderson

Prague Sinfonia Orchestra



Prague Sinfonia Orchestra at Teatro San Carlo (Napoli)
Photo: Silvio Mason

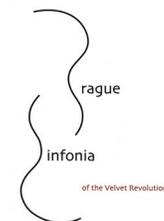
During the celebrations of the Czech National Day, the former President of the Czech Republic Václav Havel became Honorary President of the Prague Sinfonia Orchestra in a gala concert under Christian Benda at the Czech National House in New York City. After having collaborated with conductors such as Václav Neumann, Gerd Albrecht, Charles Mackerras, Trevor Pinnock and, for over ten years with Christian Benda, its chief conductor and artistic director, the Prague Sinfonia Orchestra was established for the symphonic repertoire during Prague Chamber Orchestra's sixteenth tour of North America. The orchestra has toured widely throughout the world, and is a regular participant of Czech musical life, with concert series in Prague and participation in festivals such as Salzburg, Bregenz, Berlin, Dresden, Lucerne, Montreux, Cheltenham, Besançon, and Biarritz. Solo artists performing with the orchestra have included Maxim Vengerov, Arturo Benedetti-Michelangeli, Friedrich Gulda, Emil Gilels, Henryk Szeryng, Mischa Maisky, and Christoph Eschenbach. Recordings for companies including RCA, EMI, Decca, Sony Classics, Naxos, Polydor, Nippon Columbia, Denon, BMG, Telarc, Ariola, Eurodisc and Supraphon have won a number of prestigious prizes, including the Wiener Flötenuhr, the Grand Prix du Disque Académie Charles Cros twice, and, after having sold one million records, the Golden Disc Award.

Christian Benda



Photo: Vincent Calmel

Christian Benda is descended from a long line of musicians. First guest conductor of the Turin Philharmonic, he appears worldwide with orchestras including the Prague Symphony, Shanghai Philharmonic, Orchestra della Toscana, I Pomeriggi Musicali, Polish National Opera, Budapest Concert Orchestra MÁV, Slovenian Philharmonic, Cyprus State, Moscow Virtuosi, Sinfonieorchester Münster, Stuttgarter Kammerorchester, Ulster Orchestra, Theatro Municipal do Rio de Janeiro, Orquestra Sinfônica do Estado de São Paulo, and Suisse Romande Orchestra, and is invited by festivals such as Schwetzingen, Echternach/Luxemburg, Cité de la musique Paris, Prague Spring, George Enescu Bucharest, Hong Kong Arts, Klangbogen Wien, and the Menuhin Festival in Switzerland. Christian Benda is chief conductor and artistic director of the Prague Sinfonia Orchestra with which he has recorded numerous standard classical works, as well as the complete overtures of Schubert [Naxos 8.570328-29] and Rossini. Singers such as Renée Fleming, Barbara Hendricks, Cheryl Studer, and Simon Estes have appeared under his baton. As a composer, his micro-operas have been created at the Vienna Konzerthaus and the Prague Smetana Hall. In collaboration with the Vienna State Opera he has devised a new introduction to opera for the general public and young people, *High-Lights and Micro-Opera*, based on Goethe's colour theory, with the participation of narrator and dancers.



The enduring popularity of Rossini's operas is a testament to their wit and inventiveness, every overture a superb portrait of each ensuing drama. There is none more popular than the farcical comedy of *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, but themes of flirtation and disguise can also be found in *Il Turco in Italia*, contrasting with the heroism and revenge of *Armida* and the cunning exploits of *Le Comte Ory*. This edition, of which this is the final instalment, has gained wide critical acclaim, with Volume 2 (8.570934) described as "an unalloyed winner" by *ClassicsToday.com*.

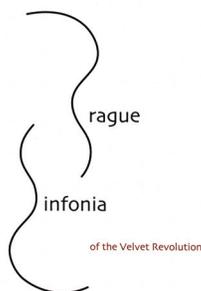


Gioachino
ROSSINI
(1792-1868)



Complete Overtures • 4

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|----------|---------------------------------|-------------|
| 1 | Il barbiere di Siviglia | 7:27 |
| 2 | Il Turco in Italia | 9:00 |
| 3 | Sinfonia in E flat major | 5:23 |
| 4 | Ricciardo e Zoraide | 9:11 |
| 5 | Torvaldo e Dorliska | 8:36 |
| 6 | Armida | 6:09 |
| 7 | Le Comte Ory | 3:06 |
| 8 | Bianca e Falliero | 6:38 |



Prague Sinfonia Orchestra • Christian Benda

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